

# **GENDER BIAS IN ASSESSING BODY IMAGE PLASTICITY**

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## **Abstract**

Body image in humans has a certain amount of plasticity, sometimes manifesting itself in seemingly illogical ways. By inducing specific illusions that rely on visual and tactile sensory perception, the mind can be tricked into thinking that the size or shape of the body it controls has changed. In a previous study, Harness & Evans (2003) experimented with an illusion (originally described by V.S. Ramachandran) that produces in some people a misperception that an inanimate object is a part of the body. By experimenting with this illusion in a large population of various ages, they demonstrated that mental plasticity can change as a function of age and gender. Since the previous study employed only female experimenters, experimental bias of the gender-related results cannot be ruled out. The present study is intended to test the reproducibility of the results when using only male experimenters. We gathered data from similar groups of people with the intention of testing the hypothesis that the gender-related conclusions of the 2003 study by Harness & Evans may have been biased due to the gender of the experimenters.